While the crowd was invading the Winter Palace, a meeting opened at the Smolny. The Communists described it as the second All-Russian Congress of the Soviets, but actually it was a gathering of hand-picked delegates from different parts of Russia, without credentials. This meeting declared that the All-Russian Executive Committee was dissolved and that the Provisional Government was deposed. It appointed a new government, the Council of People's Commissars headed by Lenin, abolished the local democratically elected councils, and ordered transfer of local authorities to the respective Soviets. The old Executive Committee declared all these decisions illegal and proclaimed that until another Congress of the Soviets was properly elected, the old All-Russian Committee remained the only legal central organ of workers and soldiers.

Both the Communist convention and the old Executive Committee called on the army for support. The government was again out of the game, the constitutional crisis was again the clash between the moderate and extremist groups within the Soviets. I phoned to Krasnov to brief him on the changed political situation, stressing that my functions as Commissar of the Provisional Government had ended but that I remained at my post as the Commissar of the All-Russian Executive Committee. He assured me of his and his men's unshakable allegiance to any government fighting against the Communists. Then I advised him to get in personal touch with Kerensky. Reluctantly, the general agreed.

On November 8 the first echelons of the Cossacks left Ostrov, not far from Pskov. Kerensky had asked Krasnov to let him enter Petrograd with the head echelons. The general agreed to his presence in the task force on condition that he keep clear of military operations and make no speeches. I remained in Pskov in the hope that I would be able to persuade more soldiers—and at least a few companies of infantry—to join the task force. Telegrams were arriving about echelons sent toward Petrograd from other fronts, but they had to cover long distances and I was not sure they could get there in time.

We still had friends in the ranks. The politically alert and patriotic elements in the army realized that the seizure of power by the rioting Petrograd garrison was a disaster for Russia. Delegates from individual companies scattered along the front came to my office with offers to support the expedition. Unfortunately, each company would have had to cross an area held by other troops; none could be transferred to the railroad in regular formation, as a unit. The men had to travel inconspicuously, in small groups. This was a long procedure, and time was short.

On November 9 I received a telegram from General Krasnov. His head echelons had reached Gatchina in the morning, had occupied the